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GARDEN CALENDAR

A radio talk by W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC stations, Tuesday, August 23, 1932.

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Well folks, last Tuesday when Mr. Salisbury so kindly substituted for me on the Farm and Home Hour program, I was in Indianapolis, Indiana, meeting a host of my good friends who were attending the annual convention of the Vegetable Growers Association of America, Incorporated. And wasn't it hot in Indianapolis the early part of last week? But, that didn't keep a single vegetable grower away from the convention, and how the wives and the daughters and a few of the sons of these vegetable growers did turn out to the convention. A good many of the boys had to stay home and keep the work going, and go to market and bring home the cash so that dad and the rest of the family could enjoy the convention.

You know habit is a wonderful thing, but I don't believe that it was altogether force of habit that made a couple hundred of these gardeners get up at four o'clock Tuesday morning and go down to the big farm-owned and operated wholesale market to see the hundreds of truck-loads of many kinds of vegetables from all over the State of Indiana. I say it was not all habit, because I never acquired the early-to-market habit, but I was there just the same. I couldn't help wondering who in the world would eat all of the muskmelons, watermelons, and sweet corn that was for sale on that market last Tuesday morning. "That's nothing," said one of the market men, "you ought to have been here at 3:00 o'clock when there was some real stuff on the market."

I certainly enjoyed my three-day visit with these advocates of the full dinner table, and learning that many of them, especially the ladies, at this season of the year, listen to the Garden Calendar, and the rest of the Farm and Home Hour programs. A good many of the men are too busy to listen to the programs in the growing season. Some of them are in the fields when the programs come on the air, but the ladies have formed a sort of information bureau, and they listen for everything that has a bearing on the work being conducted on the farm, then they pass the word along to the men folks later.

The college and experiment station men were at the convention telling the growers about the results of the many experiments that are being conducted to find out the "where" and the "why" of things. I want to tell you about one of these experiments.--For many years celery growers have been troubled with their celery bolting, or shooting to seed before it is ready to market. They attribute the trouble to all sorts of things, poor seed, seedbed drying out, plants getting stunted, cold weather after the plants are set in the field, and a number of other causes. Sometimes a whole planting of celery will shoot to seed while another planting grown right out of the same lot of seed will be all right, and not a plant go to seed.

(over)



Prof. H. C. Thompson, Head of the Vegetable Garden Department of the New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell University determined to crack this "scientific nut", and so he tried freezing the plants before setting them in the field. He also tried letting the plants dry out and wilt badly; he tried early and late seeding, in fact, he tried everything he could think of to make the plants go to seed, but all of the theories about the causes of premature seeding failed. Finally, it was discovered that it was mainly a matter of temperature while the plants are in the seedbed or in the transplanting bed.

Celery is usually considered a cool-weather plant, that is, it will continue to grow until late in the season when the nights become quite cool, even with light frosts at times. For that very reason, celery growers concluded that if you want your celery plants for spring planting to be strong and healthy, you must keep them cool, so it became the custom to grow the plants outdoors in coldframes where the temperature often gets down nearly to the point where frost forms. As it turned out, according to Prof. Thompson's results, that's where the trouble started. He repeated his experiments every year for about five years, planting the celery seed in the greenhouse where the temperature averaged around 65 or 68 degrees. After the plants were well started, Prof. Thompson transplanted them in boxes or trays, and after they were all well established and growing nicely; he took one-half of the trays out of the greenhouse and placed them in a coldframe where the temperature averaged about 15 degrees lower than that of the greenhouse. They were kept in the coldframe varying periods from 10 days to 35 days. Now, please remember that the celery plants did not frost or freeze in the coldframe, but were merely at a lower average temperature than those in the greenhouse. They were in the same kind of soil, were watered the same, and had the same treatment as those in the greenhouse, except as to temperature.

Like many another experiment, the results of this one turned out to be very different from what most of us expected. The plants that had been grown at a lower average temperature nearly all went to seed while scarcely one of those kept at the higher temperature bolted. It was that cool period in the coldframe that made the plants go to seed after they were planted in the celery field or the garden.

This was just one of the interesting reports given by scientific workers at the Vegetable Growers convention in Indianapolis last week.

While I didn't stay for the final wind-up and banquet of the Vegetable Growers convention, I did have a good time while I was there and incidentally picked up a lot of pointers that I'll be passing on to you in my garden calendar talks. So long for this time.